

State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

CONNECTICUT COMMISSION ON CHILDREN
Minutes of Meeting

Legislative Office Building Room 1A
Hartford, Connecticut

Tuesday, May 9, 2006
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Voting members present: Judith A. Busch, James P. Cordier, Representative Andrew M. Fleischmann, Dr. Alex Geertsma, Alison Hilding, Josh Piteo, Mary Grace Reed and John Yrchik.

Ex officio members (or designees) present: Office of Policy and Management (Anne Foley), Department of Social Services (Sylvia Gafford-Alexander), Department of Public Health (Norma Gyle), Department of Correction (Mary Johnson), and Department of Mental Retardation (Commissioner Peter O'Meara).

Members absent: Department of Children and Families (Rudy Brooks), George Coleman, Mary Fox, Senator Mary Ann Handley, Representative Michael Lawlor, Judge Michael Mack, Senator Christopher Murphy, Attorney General (Susan Pearlman), Laura Lee Simon and Leslie Wolfgang.

Commission staff present: Elaine Zimmerman, Thomas Brooks, Elizabeth Brown, Patricia Estill, Kevin Flood, Dawn Homer-Bouthiette, and Rachel Levy.

Guest Speakers: Christine Parker, Charlene Russell-tucker, Jennifer McTiernan H., Sharon Okoye, Councilman Robert L. Painter, John E. Theirault

Handouts: Agenda; Minutes for March 14, 2006 and April 11, 2006, Childhood Obesity in Connecticut: A Health Epidemic, CT Childhood Obesity Advisory Council, The Obesity Challenge in Connecticut Produced by the CT Department of Public Health, CDC Article: Healthy Youth!, Preventing Chronic Diseases: Investing Wisely in Health: Financing Childhood Obesity Prevention Programs, Fact Sheet: Safe Routes to School, Powerpoint: School Nutrition, Physical Activity and Wellness Policies, Public Act #06-63 An Act Concerning Healthy Food and Beverages in Schools, Public Act #06-44 An Act Promoting the Physical Health Needs of Students, Hartford Courant Article: House Puts Lid on Soda, The Boston Globe Article: After soda ban, nutritionist say more can be done, Press Release: Governor Rell Launches *No Child Left Inside* to Get Youngsters Outside and Showcase State Parks, Lessons Learned: Promoting

Physical Activity at the Community Level, Childhood Obesity & Our Sprawling Landscape (CCM – Jan. 26, 2006), What's Health Got to Do With It?

Meeting Convened

Chair James Cordier called the meeting to order at 10:11 a.m.

Minutes

John Yrchik moved to approve the minutes of March 14, 2006. The motion was seconded by Josh Piteo and unanimously approved.

Representative Fleischmann moved to approve the minutes of April 11, 2006. The motion was seconded by Josh Piteo and unanimously approved.

Nomination of Officers for the Coming Year

Mr. Cordier asked the Nominations Committee – consisting of Dr. Alex Geertsma, Alison Hilding, and Mary Grace Reed – to present its report. Dr. Geertsma, speaking as chairman of the committee, said the committee's extensive research and interviewing led it to nominate the following slate: Mr. Cordier as chairman, George Coleman as vice-chairman, Ms. Reed as secretary, and Mr. Piteo as treasurer. Mr. Cordier opened to the floor to other nominations. None were offered. Ms. Reed moved that the nominations be closed. The motion was seconded by Ms. Busch and unanimously approved. Mr. Cordier noted that Commission bylaws call for an election of officers at the June meeting.

Childhood Obesity Forum

Mr. Cordier moved to the centerpiece of the meeting, a forum entitled, "The 'Skinny' on Childhood Obesity – Next Steps in Response to a Health Epidemic." He noted that just two weeks ago, the General Assembly adopted the strongest school nutrition legislation in the nation, singling out Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams and Representative Andrew Fleischmann for their leadership on the measure. He also thanked Governor Rell, noting that she has promised to sign the bill. Mr. Cordier said more must be done, however, owing the scope of the childhood obesity epidemic. He turned the proceedings over to Commission Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman, who moderated the forum.

Ms. Zimmerman asked Representative Fleischmann to explain the new legislation. He said it has two components – one concerning beverages, the other concerning food. On the beverage side, it requires public schools to only serve the following beverages: milk, milk substitute (e.g. rice milk or soy milk), 100% fruit or vegetable juice, and water. All soda is banned from sale during school hours and from vending machines. On the food side, the legislation gives school systems an incentive to provide healthy food, specifically by giving them an extra 10 cents in state assistance for every school lunch, as long as they offer only the foods listed in an extensive state Department of Education guide.

Representative Fleischmann said Connecticut has had an impact on the national conversation about healthy food and beverage choices for children; it is not a coincidence, he said, that the National Food and Beverage Association negotiated voluntary guidelines for removing soda from school beverage machines nationwide in the wake of Connecticut's bill.

Christine Parker, Obesity Program Director, Connecticut Department of Public Health, said only smoking exceeds obesity in contributing to morbidity in the U.S. It has been tied to everything from depression and sleep apnea to stroke and some cancers. So far, there is no trend data for obesity in Connecticut children, she said. She noted, though, that an estimated 12 percent of high school students in the state meet the definition. Since federal data indicates 50% of all adolescents are overweight, Connecticut's statistics are grossly understated and need updating, she said.

Dr. Geertsma said he other Connecticut pediatricians would like see general data on childhood obesity collected on a regular basis. Schools and daycare centers have it, but currently no one is able to access the data and compile it. Dr. Geertsma said several grant applications are pending for initiatives that call for pedestrians to collaborate with their surrounding communities to encourage healthier eating habits in parents and young children alike.

Jennifer McTiernan H., Executive Director, CitySeed of New Haven, explained the benefits of her farmer's market, explaining that it's important for children to develop "a personal relationship" with fruits and vegetables at an early age. When they do, she said, they're more likely to continue eating it through their adult lives. She also noted that CitySeed is the first farmer's market in Connecticut to accept food stamps, which makes it an affordable option for poor people seeking healthy food.

Charlene Russell-Tucker, Bureau Chief, and Susan Fiore, Nutrition Education Coordinator, Bureau of Health and Nutrition Services, and Child/Family/School Partnerships, Connecticut Department of Education, gave an overview the Department's efforts on school wellness. They noted that 2004 legislation requires the adoption of school wellness policies by the 2006-07 school year and said the Department is assisting districts in drafting their policies. This includes offering action guides and surveying districts on what they need.

Hartford Councilman Robert L. Painter said the scope of the obesity problem means Connecticut municipalities must collaborate to make any headway against it. The consequences of poor diet are especially apparent in urban school districts, he said. He noted one troubled school saw a dramatic drop in student behavioral problems when it sought changes in student diets; that can be replicated throughout Connecticut, he said.

Waterbury Board of Education member John E. Theriault concurred, saying towns and cities need to avail themselves of every opportunity to address the problem.

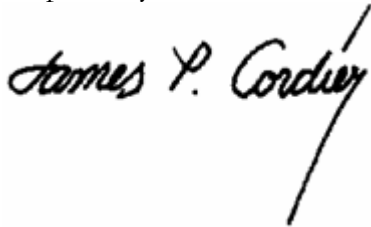
Sharon Okoye, Safe Routes to Schools Coordinator, Department of Transportation, outlined the DOT's new effort to encourage more children to walk and bicycle to school in conjunction with road and sidewalk improvements. About \$1.5 million in federal funds can be tapped for the project, she said.

Closing

Before adjournment, Alison Hilding noted that this was the last meeting at which Judy Busch would be serving as a Commission officer, owing to term limits. She and other Commission members took to opportunity to thank Ms. Busch for her years of service as both chairman and vice-chairman of the Commission.

Mr. Cordier closed the meeting at 12:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James P. Cordier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends below the name.

James P. Cordier
Chair